

it's down to the sound of a heartbeat by orphan_account

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Summary:

Anonymous asked: Will and Mike are 14 or so. They're having a sleepover and sharing the bed. Will sometimes has very vivid nightmares/flashbacks. Today, he woke up crying and screaming, feeling like he's being burned alive again.

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Author's Note:

I tagged this as established relationship, but there's no kiss or anything, so technically it could be read as a really strong friendship, if that's your thing! Thank you anon for the prompt, and I hope you all enjoy! :)

The time in between Halloween and Christmas is the hardest part of the year for Will to get through. The doctors call it the “anniversary effect”, but Will has never understood it. After an entire year of not being bothered by the creatures in the Upside Down, Will would've thought that he'd be *less* anxious, not more. Yet he's back to having nightmares nearly every night, crying in the day, and needing the lights to be on no matter what time it is, haunted by the shadows that silently creep over the walls.

“Are you sure you’re okay to go to Mike’s?” Joyce asks, both of her hands resting on Will’s cheeks. He lets her, begrudgingly admitting that the comforting gesture feels nice.

“Yeah, Mom,” he says. “Nancy will be there all night, too.”

Only a few years ago, Will would have never thought Nancy could protect him, but he never would have thought there was a parallel universe where monsters roam just underneath them, either.

“Call me, no matter what time it is, if you feel like you need to come home,” she says firmly. “I’ll be working, but you remember the store’s number, right?”

Will nods and assures her, “I’ll call if I need you.”

“Okay,” she smiles, kissing his cheek. “Have fun, baby.”

He gives his mom one last smile before getting out of the car and approaching the Wheeler’s house. Ted answers the door after a few minutes of waiting, silently nodding his head in the direction of the stairs.

“Thanks,” Will says, knowing by now Ted is a man of few words, and even fewer emotions.

Mike’s door is shut, but Will can hear his voice through it.

“He’s spending the night, *over* ,” Mike says.

Will sighs, his hand paused on the doorknob. He hears Lucas replying, “Is he okay? *Over* .”

“I don’t know, I haven’t seen him, obviously,” Mike says. “ *Over* .”

“Oh, hey, Will!”

Will jumps, his arm knocking into the door as he spins around. It’s Nancy, smiling at him from the end of the hallway.

“Hi, Nancy,” Will says, nervously glancing at the door again.

Mike opens it, his presence calming even when Will feels a little guilty for listening in on his conversation. Mike’s eyes are soft when he says, “How long’ve you been here?”

“Only a second,” Will says quickly. He belatedly smiles at Nancy, and then Mike is pulling him inside and shutting the door behind them.

“Hey,” Mike says, smiling that smile that’s just for Will. “Did you hear that?”

“A little bit,” Will admits.

With a sheepish look on his face, Mike runs his hands through his hair. It’s gotten longer and curlier recently, sometimes tangled. “Sorry. Lucas has been worried—We all have been. You’re okay, though? No, um, episodes?”

“I don’t have episodes anymore,” Will says. “*I promise* . I’m fine, really.”

It strikes Will, then, that he’s not the only traumatized person around here. While he might have been the one that was possessed by the Mind Flayer, everyone else had to watch it happen, seeing him

deteriorate into an evil, heartless shell of who he used to be. He can't forget the way that it felt like he was clawing at the walls of his own skin, shouting into an empty, echoing room. He remembers sending the lab workers into the trap, hears their screams and the breaking bones, the wet sounds of the demogorgons feasting on their bodies. He knows that Bob being eaten alive was his fault. He's never told anyone, but sometimes he wonders how his mom and Mike and everyone else could possibly forgive him. He doesn't know if he'll ever forgive himself.

"Will? You okay?"

Will frowns, nodding. All he's doing is proving that he's *not* okay.

"Sorry," Will says, shaking his head. "Um, you were gonna show me that new game, right?"

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Most of Will's nightmares aren't actually nightmares at all, they're memories. That makes it so much worse, knowing that if all of this happened, there might still be more to come.

In his dreams, he's more helpless than ever. He knows he's dreaming, but he can't wake up. He's forced to watch himself be possessed and controlled every night, unable to stop it.

Some nights, though, he has *nightmares*. The kind that aren't real, but are just as terrifying. He dreams of killing Mike, gripping his throat so hard that his fingernails leave craters, watching the life drain out of Mike's face while the monster inside Will laughs. He dreams of all his friends getting killed by the demogorgons in the tunnels. He dreams of never being saved from the Upside Down, and when he wakes up, he wonders if that's what should have happened.

Tonight, he dreams of fire. Red hot, flicking against his skin, surrounding him *everywhere*. He feels the monster thrashing around inside of him, hears it shrieking and crying and hears himself doing the same. It smells like burning flesh and smoke. He's lost control of himself—he *isn't* himself anymore, he's all monster.

Until, suddenly, all the agony dissipates.

“Will, Will, wake up, Will—”

Will forces his eyes open, his body paralyzed. He’s breathing so heavily that he might make himself pass out.

“Will,” Mike says, less urgently. He sounds sad. “It’s okay, I’m here. It’s not real.”

“It—It *is* real,” Will says desperately, his fingers twitching.

Mike cautiously puts his hand over Will’s chest, his heart racing under his palm. “What did you dream about?”

The stiffness of Will’s arms starts to dissolve and he can move them again. He tucks them under Mike’s back, craving warmth and comfort even though his blood still feels like it’s boiling. He tucks his head in between Mike’s shoulder and his pillow, closing his eyes. “Burning,” he says.

Mike seems to understand. “That’s never gonna happen again, okay?” he says. “The gate is closed, Will. He can’t hurt you anymore.”

Will blinks rapidly, tears leaking out against his will. “I wish that was true.”

Mike falls into silence. “I’m sorry,” he says quietly. “I want to help, but I—I don’t—”

“You do help me,” Will says, and tilts his head up enough to see Mike’s face. “You sleep with the lights on for me, and you wake me up when I have nightmares, and you talk to me until I feel better.”

Will feels his heart slow down, the steady weight of Mike’s hand calming him.

Mike’s bottom lip quivers, and Will closes his eyes again. “I have nightmares too,” Mike admits. “I don’t tell anyone, because—this isn’t about me. But I just... I think about losing you, and I—” Mike chokes out a sob as he exhales. “I just mean, that—I understand. I know they’re not nightmares, they’re real. But shit like that is *never*

going to happen again.”

Will feels less like he’s burning, now, and more like he’s just—warm. In a good way. All Will can see and feel and hear is Mike, he’s surrounded by him like a warm blanket.

Sleepily, his eyes drooping, Mike says, “I sleep with the lights on even when you’re not here.”

“Really?” Will asks.

Mike nods, pushing his face closer to Will. “It makes me feel better, and,” he stops, laughing at himself. “I guess it makes me feel like you’re here with me all the time.”

Will blushes, and then yawns. “I’m sorry I woke you up,” he says. “You must get sick of it sometimes.”

“I don’t,” Mike says. “I like this.”

For emphasis, he squeezes Will a little tighter, and presses a kiss to Will’s hair. Will smiles into Mike’s chest. “Remember how you said we’d go crazy together?”

“Yeah. Are you saying we’re crazy?”

Will giggles. “I don’t think it’s a bad thing,” he says. “And I—I wouldn’t want to go crazy with anyone but you.”

It takes them a while to fall asleep again. Will still feels a little shaken from his nightmare, but he eventually drifts off somewhere in between Mike running his hands through Will’s hair and rubbing his back. And then, for the first time this year, he has a good dream.

Author's Note:

Thank you for reading!!